

Business profile ...

Aladdin Travel Agency

We asked Meridian business owners to fill out questionnaires about themselves and their work. Some questions were serious, some were just for fun.

Partners Penny Stephens and Leah Shannon opened Aladdin Travel Agency in 1983.

Penny and her husband, Johnny, have two sons — Scott, 29, and Brian, 33. They live in the Briarwood community and attend NorthPark Church.

Leah and her husband, Leonard, also have two sons — Len, 48, and David, 45. They live in Meridian and attend Poplar Springs Drive United Methodist Church.

Both ladies are members of Cruise Line International Association and Vacation.Com.

By Penny Stephens
and Leah Shannon
special to The Star

First, the fun

A movie about our lives and work would be called "Dream Builders" because we make people's dream vacations and other getaways come true. Leah would be played by Paula Abdul, and Penny would be played by Vanna White.

Our business

- We plan vacations and honeymoons as well as business trips. The main thing we do is we sell cruises and air and hotel packages.

- How it started? We opened our office in 1983 after many years of experience in the business.

- No. of employees: Three

What we think

- The best piece of professional advice we ever received was from Axeth "Shorty" Bullock, who said what you have as a travel



PHOTO BY STEVE GILLESPIE / THE MERIDIAN STAR

BUILDERS OF DREAMS

Leah Shannon, left, and Penny Stephens have worked together in the travel agency business for 31 years. They opened Aladdin Travel Agency on Constitution Avenue in 1983.

I CAN'T IMAGINE

- ▶ A day without God in my life.
- ▶ A week without a little rest and relaxation.
- ▶ A year without a cruise.

agent is your professional expertise.

- What Penny looks for in employees is one who is not allergic to hard work. What Leah looks for in employees is one who is not allergic to suggestions, has an outgoing personality and works well with the public.

- The best thing that happened at our business this year was, "We've had such good rela-

tionships with our clients and have enjoyed meeting new clients."

- The biggest challenge our business faces in the coming year is educating the general public to realize the importance of a trained, qualified travel consultant. It's nice to have someone to sit down and talk to, and to advise them.

A letter from home

- Has Sept. 11 and the U.S. War on Terror changed this country? It's certainly changed the travel business. The security measures have changed at airports and it takes longer to check in at airports and cruise ports.

- Has it touched our families' lives? Sept. 11 made us appreciate family and friends more so. Our values changed after 9-11.

- Has it affected our business? There are still some people who are apprehensive about travel.

- Our message for the troops: We appreciate the sacrifices you and your family have made to promote freedom all over the world.

SPEAK UP

Here's how these Lauderdale County residents answered the question, "Now that we're this far into the war and Saddam Hussein has been captured, do you think we should pull our troops out and let the Iraqis take over — or stay and finish what we started? Why?" This poll was conducted in December, before the elections in Iraq.

"No, we should not pull our troops out yet because the Iraqis do not have their country under control and things might go back to the way they were pre-war."

Monica Loden, 31
teacher

"I believe that we should finish the work that we started to bring democracy to the nation. We should show that we will not back down to terrorist threats and pressures, and also, it is good to finish what we start. They need to have a well-established, functioning democratic process in place before we leave."

Kim Davis, 33
teacher

"Although I feel the reasoning in going into Iraq was dubious to say the least, I definitely feel that we must stay in Iraq until the job is done. After the elections, however, I feel we should adopt the Nixonian approach: Vietnamization — slowly taking troops out and replacing them with Iraqi officials."

Gary James, 17
student

"I think that our troops should remain in Iraq to add the finishing touches to what the United States started. In my opinion, the U.S. started it and the U.S. should finish it. I do not think our troops should be removed from Iraq and leave everything to the people of Iraq because I believe it is still the responsibility of the U.S. to make sure everything ends the way it should."

Brittany Mars, 16
student

"I think we should finish what we started, because I don't think the Iraqi government is strong enough to carry on without more guidance from the United States."

Joy Ethridge, 42
counselor

"I definitely think that we should stay and finish what we started. If we pull out now, it will make other countries think we are weak and don't follow through with our promises."

Cathi Harper, 50
nuclear med-tech

"I think we should continue until they are able to run their own country, and I don't think they are ready yet. They still need more training and intelligence."

Suzette Sullivan, 50
Meridian Community College

"I do not think we should pull out now. We haven't accomplished what we need to, and if we stop now, all our soldiers will have died in vain."

Aimee Chandler, 26
Meridian Community College

"Although I don't want our troops over there, I know that, if they are not there, then Iraq will probably go back to the way it was before we arrived."

J.D. Fuller, 18
student

Abby Havard, a sophomore at Southeast Lauderdale High School, compiled this Speak Up question. Her parents are John and Jeanne Havard and she has a sister, Alison. The family attends Hebron Baptist Church. Abby plays softball for Southeast, and plans to pursue a career as a movie editor and/or animator.



Havard

Worth the fight

Andrew Follett is a freshman at Lamar School in Meridian — where he plays football and basketball for the Raiders. His parents are local attorneys George and Lean Follett and he has a brother, Nathaniel, who is a high school senior at the Mississippi School of Math and Science on the campus of Mississippi University for Women. The family attends Central United Methodist Church.



Follett

By Andrew Follett
special to The Star

I have not been affected deeply by any death in Iraq, and do not know any overseas military personnel. So, I may not be entitled to write on this subject.

If you have been affected personally by

the death of a friend or family member overseas, I regret your loss, and regret it even more so if your opinions differ from mine.

I believe the fight overseas has been worth it. Saddam Hussein was an evil dictator who needed to be removed from power. We have found no weapons of mass destruction, but that doesn't mean Saddam didn't want them. Now Iraq is a free, democratic state with elections.

I don't quite understand why there is still fighting in Iraq. The people must realize they are better off now than they were two years ago. They claim to fight for their religion, but we have given them freedom of religion.

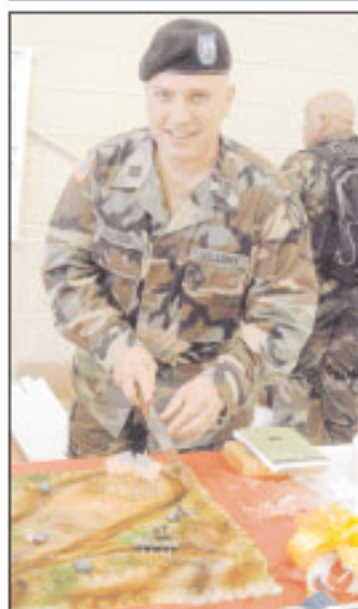
I believe it is our responsibility as a nation to support our troops. They were not asked if they wanted to go overseas. No one asks their opinion of the war. But they put down their lives for people they don't even know — so that total strangers can enjoy better lives. We can support our troops with our hearts, actions and prayers.

I have seen members of my congregation start collection baskets to send care packages to soldiers overseas. I have seen



money taken to send to those less fortunate in Iraq. I have seen teddy bears collected to send to Iraqi children.

It is these acts of charity, plus the courage to fight cruelty, that makes America the best country in the world. I am proud to be a citizen of the God-blessed United States, and I am proud to see other citizens of my country fight for freedom.



Palmer

Capt. Henry A. "Hap" Palmer of the Mississippi Army National Guard's 150th Combat Engineer Battalion at Key Field is a branch officer and lender at Community Bank.

He was deployed to Iraq in January, and his tour of duty is expected to last about a year. His unit will be attached to the 2nd Marine Expeditionary Force. Hap Palmer is the son of Henry and Jan Palmer of Meridian and a graduate of the University of Mississippi. He and his wife, Ashley, have two children — 4-year-old Jake and 2-year-old Olivia. The family attends Daleville Methodist Church.

We Miss You, Hap!



Community Bank, Meridian staff: front row (l-r) Gina Wall, Sharon Rose, Donna Payne, Stephanie Grace, Dell Smith, Kim McAfee, Cerna Moss, Cristy Stuart, Beverly Isaacs; second row (l-r) Debbie Shirley, Dianne Travis, Cindy White, Shaun Eubanks, Kathy Anderson, Ann Harper, Tanya Hodnett; third row (l-r) Jeff McCoy, Bob Huff, Debbie McCann, Colby Calcutt, Michelle Way, Pat Moran, Joan Rosenbaum, Regina Petty, Jo Ellen Taylor; Patricia Naylor, Karen Hansen; fourth row (l-r) Bubba Hampton, Chuck Nicholson.

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Dell Smith
Sharon Rose
A. Sam Eubanks
Kathy Anderson
Bubba Hampton

Kimberly Magee
Joan Rosenbaum
Ann Harper
Amanda Montgomery
Patricia Naylor (we miss you)
Karen Hansen
Cerna Moss
Jo Ellen Taylor
Patricia Naylor
Gat Moran
Debbie McCann
Cristy Stuart
Gina Wall
Cindy White
Michelle Way (McMississippi!)

From Your Co-Workers at Community Bank